

COLOSSAL PHILANTHROPY.

AN ADDRESS

BY

WHITELOW REID,

IN OPENING A

PUBLIC LIBRARY AT LUTON,

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1st, 1910.

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HARRISON AND SONS, PRINTERS

LONDON, 1910.

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OPENING THE LUTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

You do well to mark this occasion with some rejoicing and official festivity. Perhaps you even do well to mark it with an indulgence in that passion for speech making at every opportunity which you are apt to describe as American, but which I call you all to witness was distinctly English and British long before the settlement of America. One can only regret that you have not now found for it a speaker to the manner born.

But the day certainly deserves at your hands the recognition you are giving it, for it is a day on which you gain a notable new public building and a notable new citizen. I shall have to say something presently about the new

13.2.30. Exch. Hamilton coll. 66.
Clinton, N.Y.

building, since you have imposed upon me the duty of formally opening it—an honour which I owe no doubt to the privilege I have enjoyed of being your near neighbour for now six summers, such as they are, and if you count the late one as a summer at all.

But first, perhaps, I might say something about your new citizen, since he is my countryman, and since I have known him rather well, and a long time, without ever knowing much to his disadvantage, excepting that in spite of his liking for libraries, his spelling is deplorable. Naturally my attention was arrested by a reference to him which I happened to hear the other day, as I passed that point of high thinking, or at least high speaking, the corner of Hyde Park near the Marble Arch. That locality is sometimes spoken of as the safety valve of London, on the theory, apparently, that superheated social or political steam is there safely blown off. My own limited observations have led me to think it occasionally less a safety valve for hot

clean steam than a defect in the drainage, from which is escaping a tepid and pestilential flow of sewer gas. Let that pass, however, as the hasty and perhaps quite erroneous impression of a casual listener.

But what I heard the other day set me to thinking. The orator was discoursing about the plunderers of honest toil, and he pictured your new citizen, not too indistinctly, as one of the worst of them, a man who had amassed a great fortune out of profits that rightfully belonged to the working men he employed and cheated, and who was now doling out a little of it, in trivial and useless ways, merely to gain a cheap reputation for philanthropy. Well, I remembered that Mr. Carnegie had always paid good wages, paid promptly, and found new employment for many men, as well as that the only serious disagreement that ever occurred there between employers and employés was without his knowledge and when he had been absent for months on another continent. I also remembered that he had been something of a

working man himself, that he began as a weaver's lad in a cotton factory, was next a messenger boy in a telegraph office, and profiting by that opportunity, picked up the art himself, that he thus worked his way into a railroad office, and so up till he became a railway superintendent, next a successful manufacturer of railway iron, and that he then had the far-seeing sagacity, courage and indomitable persistence to introduce the Bessemer steel-making process in America. Recalling all this, I could see better where the fortune came from than where the plunder came in.

Then I took another look at the orator who had pronounced that surprising indictment. He didn't look or talk like a man who had much claim to speak for decent working men, or had often done an honest day's work himself. In fact, he looked like what the hard-headed but irreverent working man of my native land is apt to call "a jaw-smith"; and he was then apparently plying the trade by which he earned his unclean wage.

Going home, I chanced to find this pamphlet, containing an official report of the Trustees charged with carrying out one of Mr. Carnegie's later schemes for a cheap reputation, and looked through it to see what trivial or useless thing the bad man was doing now with his plunder. Well, he seemed to have put a great deal of money at the disposal of these Trustees, and they had been industrious and versatile in its expenditure. I found details of nearly four hundred different things they had done with it. Let me read you a few samples, almost at random :—

One of the first concerned a coal miner named Daniel Davis, out at Sherodsville, in Ohio. This young man of twenty-three and his mate were overtaken in the mine by the black-damp. Both fled. Davis got outside and was safe. Learning that his mate had fallen, he instantly went back to try to help him, but found him unconscious, was himself prostrated, and both died. The agents of this plunderer of working men hunted up the poor

wife, thus left a widow. They gave her first a record of her husband's deed on a silver medal, to be handed on to her two children that they might know what manner of man their dead father was, and then gave her two hundred pounds to help bring them up. When I read this I couldn't help wondering whether the glib orator of the Marble Arch had ever given two hundred half-pence for so good an object in his whole life.

Next in this pamphlet I found the case of a coast skipper named Castro, who went back and forth in his little sixty-foot boat through a fierce storm on the New Jersey coast to a steamer stranded on Brigantine Shoals, till he had saved fifty-two lives. To that daring and splendid Captain Mr. Carnegie's Trustees gave a gold medal as a record his son might some day like to have, with a thousand pounds to educate that son, and three hundred more to lift a mortgage on his home.

Then they found a coal miner out in Illinois whose mate was crushed to the ground

by falling slate, as they were both running from the explosion of a blast which had already been fired. This man, Boettcher by name, had reached safety, but when he learned his comrade's situation, he turned and ran desperately to the lighted fuse. It was found burnt to within a quarter of an inch of the powder where he extinguished it. Of course he was on the verge of losing his own life but he saved his mate. A hundred and seventy pounds of Mr. Carnegie's plunder went to pay off the mortgage on this gallant fellow's home.

I could keep you all the afternoon reading such cases. Let me give you only two more. In Michigan a boy of fourteen named Roller saved a schoolmate of twelve from drowning, in fifteen feet of water and a swift current, seventy-five feet from the bank. Another lad of thirteen, one Baber, saved his schoolmate of eleven from drowning in ten feet of water, and in a very swift current, in another river in the same State. Four hundred pounds of Mr. Carnegie's fund went to each of these

schoolboys, to give him as good an education as he could take. And there are nearly four hundred more cases like these, every one carefully investigated, all details studied, and the recognition likely to be most useful in each bestowed, and reported here in a matter-of-fact way as a part of their official duty by the Trustees. The fund given them by Mr. Carnegie for such purposes amounts in the United States and Canada to one million pounds ; in Great Britain and France to four hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

What nobler use is there for money than to help the men who do such things? It was one of your own poets who, in lines familiar to all of you, related Ben Adhem's dream. The Recording Angel did not find his name among those that loved the Lord. "Set me down then," begged the disappointed dreamer, "as one who loves his fellow-man." You remember the end. The Recording Angel came again, next night, with the names of those the Lord loved, and lo, Ben Adhem's

name led all the rest. Perhaps the man who finds heroes like these, helps them out of their difficulties, and preserves them, or their children, for further service to the race, does more for labour and for all classes than the one who stands on a box in Hyde Park and bawls out to a crowd of curious idlers every unreasonable and bitter phrase he can think of, to make his hearers hate and envy anybody more thrifty and more useful than themselves.

Yet all this is but a very little part of what your new citizen has long been doing. He saw that only light could make our liberties valuable or safe. In consequence, the teaching profession seemed to him the first line of National defence ; and so he has provided a pension fund for men who give their lives to that work, and placed in the hands of a most competent Board of Trustees in America three hundred thousand pounds for that purpose. He believes the world advances as our knowledge of truth is extended, and so he has given another most competent Board

two million four hundred thousand pounds for the promotion of original research. He had no chance for College training himself, but he has given to Colleges in the United States and Canada over four million pounds, and to some in the United Kingdom and Colonies one million three hundred and sixty thousand pounds more. To all this, with a tender recollection of the land of his birth, he has added a Trust for the Universities of Scotland of two millions of pounds. On the fortunate town of his birth he has bestowed for the benefit of the whole community in many helpful ways the Dunfermline Trust of half a million pounds; and for the town in which he worked his way up he has established and endowed the Pittsburg Carnegie Institute, at a cost of two million four hundred thousand pounds. For the benefit of workmen in the iron and steel works which he brought to such marvellous success he has established a Relief Fund of eight hundred thousand pounds. In a desire to diffuse among all, but especially among the orderly and moral classes, the

enjoyment he himself gets from music, he has met churches here and in America half way in the cost of their organs, till in this manner he has distributed among forty-five hundred of them in all not less than eight hundred thousand pounds. In furtherance of his efforts against War he has built a head-quarters at Washington for the International Bureau of American Republics for a hundred and fifty thousand pounds; and at a cost of three hundred thousand pounds a Palace of Peace for the International Arbitrations at The Hague—from one of which your country and mine have just emerged, with equal honour and with mutual satisfaction at the peaceful and just settlement of an embittered dispute that had lasted between us for over a century.

And now I come down to what has brought you here to-day. The lad to whom a book was a prized and expensive luxury, and who knew no University but the few books he could buy, has now sought

to bring that means of self-improvement and up-lift, by which he himself rose, within reach of all. He has thus girdled the English-speaking world with libraries, of which the very latest to be opened is yours, here in Luton, to-day. Up to July of this year he has spent in the erection of municipal library buildings like yours over ten millions one hundred and eighty-seven thousand pounds.

Add this to other sums I have mentioned or alluded to, and you have a total known amount of over thirty millions of pounds already expended for the betterment of men by this weaver lad and telegraph operator, the youngest citizen of Luton.

Thirty millions of pounds given away, painstakingly, discriminatingly, on carefully studied systems and only after laborious investigation, by one man, working almost as hard at giving away his money as he did in making it; given mainly for the

benefit of those as poor as he once was, to strengthen them by knowledge, to lift them up in distress, to promote peace in the world, and to elevate our common humanity ! I am not here to eulogize the man or his work. You can put any estimate you like upon either. I will only make this obvious and commonplace observation that never, till this twentieth century, has the world seen anything like it. Perhaps the official representative of his country may be permitted to add that America is the land still of opportunities, and that, in that happy land, even Mr. Carnegie does not stand alone. There are others !

Well, gentlemen, every unusual and extraordinary thing in the world is criticised nowadays, and even gifts like this spacious and handsome library which Luton receives do not escape fault-finding. "They impose a burden on the community," we are told. For one I rejoice that they do. A wise Providence helps those who help themselves ;

and a judicious philanthropy cannot follow a sounder or safer rule. Under Mr. Carnegie's plan, to get help, a community must co-operate with him and help itself; it gets nothing without at least valuing it enough to sustain it. Nothing for nothing is the wise and inflexible law for a manly race. This library is to be absolutely free to the poorest inhabitant of Luton, but even he must work for any good he gets out of it. The books will give him nothing, save as a result of his own study, as a reward for his own exertion. Thus neither the community nor the individual loses self-respect or is pauperised by getting without working.

When Mr. Carnegie gave at one stroke seventy-eight library buildings to New York City he refused all congratulations on his gift. "That is easy," he said; "but I'll tell you what I am proud of. I am proud of having induced the second city in the world to bind itself to sustain free libraries throughout its limits for every one of its inhabitants." That

points, of course, to the real value of all these library gifts—the uplift for the individual and the educational advantage for the community.

But right there comes another complaint, as frequent as the one about the cost to the town for keeping up its library. The new complaint is that this educational facility doesn't always educate. No doubt that often happens in these libraries. It has even been known to occur with more pretentious educational facilities, with Colleges and Universities themselves; everything depends on how the educational facility is used. Still, you don't abolish the water-trough because now and then a horse which you lead to it refuses to drink.

Then the perpetual fault-finder brings forward his weightiest charge:—"The main thing your libraries do is to feed the unwholesome appetite for cheap, sensational and demoralizing modern fiction." Now all modern fiction is not cheap or sensational, or demoralizing. Furthermore, there seems some

reason to doubt whether feeding a taste for it is after all the main thing these libraries do. People often say that half the books read in free libraries are novels. On the other hand, here is Dr. Kenyon, Principal Librarian at the British Museum, declaring of libraries generally that less than one-fourth of the books issued to readers consist of fiction.

Whatever the general tendency, I venture to suggest one consideration to the authorities here who have this matter absolutely in their own hands. Books are not so hard to get now as in Mr. Carnegie's early experience. The messenger boy who may pick up an occasional shilling by running errands, or carrying parcels or blacking boots, or some other honourable employment, can now buy with it his choice out of thousands of volumes of the best English classics from Mr. Dent's wonderful Everyman's Library. When the best books are so cheap, if such a lad must have sensational novels, why not let him buy most of them himself; and lead him here to

a larger proportion of the popular science, the travels and adventures, the biographies, the histories, the sociological and economical publications which he needs if he is to grow up a citizen worthy of England and the Empire.

Another American telegraph man founded a great University, of which he declared his ideal to be that it should enable any man to learn anything. If this building we are now to open is to be, as Mr. Carnegie and you alike desire, a real University of the people, it must aim at equally comprehensive work. Obviously then its shelves must be crowded with such books as have just been indicated, and, above all, with the latest, best, most comprehensive and most accurate works of reference. I congratulate you that this last want has already been supplied from a natural and suitable source at home. Your complete reference library will thus constantly remind you of the great house whose name your County bears, and of the broad page in British history filled with the public record of the Russells.

I have kept you unreasonably long on the threshold. It is time to enter your new public building. May it take rank in Luton, from this day forward, with your schools and your churches, and may you be able in all the future to trace to it results of similar beneficence.

In the name and by the authority of the Mayor and Council, I declare this Library now open, and free henceforth to all the inhabitants of the Borough of Luton.

THE LIBRARY AND Mr. CARNEGIE.

From the London *Times*, October 3rd, 1910.

"Mr. Whitelaw Reid, the United States Ambassador, visited Luton on Saturday and opened a new public library which Mr. Carnegie has provided at a cost of £11,660. The building is of Portland stone, with mosaic and marble entrance halls. The Duke of Bedford has subscribed £500 in order to found in it a modern reference library.

"Before the opening ceremony took place, Mr. Carnegie was presented with the freedom of the borough and an address enclosed in a casket engraved with emblems of Luton industries. At a luncheon, and again in the presence of a large crowd outside the Town Hall, Mr. Carnegie was thanked for his gift to the borough."

From *The Daily Telegraph*, October 3rd, 1910.

"Mr. Carnegie and Mr. Whitelaw Reid were loudly cheered as they drove through the town to the Town Hall by thousands of massed school children.

"Replying to the Mayor (Alderman Wilkinson), who made the presentation, Mr. Carnegie said he appreciated most what citizens did for themselves. When he gave seventy-eight branch libraries to New York—a number that was now increased to eighty-three—he needed no thanks. As the city freely undertook to maintain these libraries, he was amply repaid. Anyone could give money; it was mere dross unless put to a proper use. His happiness was in trying to stimulate others to give themselves in work and service.

"Responding to the toast of his health at the luncheon which followed the presentation of the address, Mr. Carnegie said he was delighted to see the English-speaking races drawing closer together. He felt certain that war would never occur between Great Britain and America. The crime of war was inherent, and more diabolical and sinful than any other curse affecting nations."

¶ Addresses were made at the luncheon and elsewhere during the ceremonies by Viscount Peel, Mr. T. Gair Ashton, Member of Parliament for South Bedfordshire, Mr. George Elliott, K.C., Mr. S. H. Whitbread and several others.

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